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ABSTRACT

Types of small groups for instructional purposes, and procedures, structure, and practical arrangements are discussed, and reference is made to the British system. It is suggested that an orderly beginning to small group work best suits novice tutors and inexperienced students. In some subjects tightly organized group work may become progressively less structured as students mature. Attention is directed to how the organization of group work in different forms might develop through a degree course, and whether formal rules are necessary to ensure orderly procedures. The following practical constraints limit a tutor's freedom to organize group work: it has to be fit in with syllabus requirements, timetables, assessment, and what is taught elsewhere. It is proposed that the tutor and students discuss what the group is going to do, and how their work is to be ordered, before working meetings begin. This preliminary discussion is especially important in small group work where learning is intended to be cooperative. Finally, the tried and proven patterns of small group work are examined: the seminar, other structured groups, syndicates, associative discussion groups, and tutor-less groups. Illustrative examples of how small group work can be organized are included. (SW)

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TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION SERIES : 6

ED230103

Suggestions for the consideration of lecturers and others concerned with teaching in higher education

PATTERNS AND PROCEDURES

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of a series produced with the aid of a grant from the University Grants Committee as part of its programme for the development of knowledge about and skill in teaching in higher education. The series is intended to bring together traditional wisdom (not a source to be neglected) research findings when available and relevant, and summaries of what is regarded by the informed as good practice.

The sub-title "Suggestions for the consideration of those concerned ..." echoes that of a famous manual for the guidance of elementary school teachers and this series shares the same purpose. The handbooks may at times be mildly hortatory but they are not meant to be prescriptive. Teaching is something of an art and the aim is to encourage, within sensible limits, something of a personal style. The "rules" (if such they be) are constantly broken by successful teachers but few, if any, get away with breaking all the rules all the time.

Universities and other institutions of higher education have traditionally accepted research and teaching as their principal functions. The systems developed for training in research are well worked out. Till now little has been done for teaching. The initiative taken by the University Grants Committee was widely welcomed and has led to an increasing awareness in higher education generally of the importance of giving to the teaching function the attention it deserves. This series is intended to offer help to those who wish to make an effort to improve their teaching. It is hoped that those who read these pages will, as a result, be better prepared for this important aspect of their daily work.

The authors would be glad to receive reports and illustrative material which readers may wish to send with a view to improving the next edition of these booklets.

C.F. CARTER
Vice-Chancellor
University of Lancaster.

PREFACE TO THE FOUR BOOKLETS ON SMALL GROUP TEACHING

WORKING TOGETHER — PARTICIPATORY DISCUSSION
A KIND OF LEARNING — PATTERNS AND PROCEDURES

Seminars and tutorials, though sometimes formally defined, embrace a wide range of activities; choices must be made. These booklets are to introduce the new tutor to the strengths and weaknesses of the small group and to ways of organising it for different purposes. We describe:

Group behaviour.
This is the main part of "Working Together".

Strategies for making group work more effective.
These are the strategies for improving a group's working together (in "Working Together") and strategies for achieving different intellectual objectives, set out in "Patterns and Procedures" and "A Kind of Learning".

Tactics small group tutors can use.
Group management and discussion skills are described in "Working Together" and "Participatory Discussion". The organisation of group work and the usefulness of different procedures are discussed in "Patterns and Procedures".

What can be learned through small group work.
This is what "A Kind of Learning" is about; group learning is discussed in relation to the claims of enthusiasts, research studies and some examples of group activities.

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INTRODUCTION

In the three booklets that are the companions to this one it has been shown that the strength of the small group lies in its being the best forum for developing higher order types of learning (such as the exercise of judgment and the exploration of understanding) and that this derives to a large extent from the fact that it is an exercise in interpersonal communication. This is not the only kind of learning that can take place in a small group; it is what the small group does best. In order to use formal teaching time efficiently most tutors will set about organising at least some of their seminars and tutorials with this end in mind.

The tutor then faces three basic problems:

* how to create working relationships so that real communication is possible - this was the subject of "Working Together";
* how to create a situation that makes this kind of learning possible for all the students in the group by the careful choice of tasks and activities - this was covered in "A Kind of Learning";
* how to create a situation that makes this kind of learning a realistic exercise by the careful choice of procedures - this is the subject of the present booklet.

For many people the simple solution to each of these problems is a more or less informally conducted discussion group. And it certainly seems to be the case that, under the guidance of a skilful tutor, students who are at a point in their courses where they know enough about a subject to make discussion worthwhile will find that by this means they can approximate to the kind of learning described by enthusiastic advocates of co-operative learning. (We refer you back to "A Kind of Learning" and to "Particiapatory Discussion".) Nevertheless inexperienced tutors may find it difficult to realise this claim. Behind it lies the assumption that learning by the individual student keeps up with learning by the group as a whole and that real achievement at a level proper to the requirements of a course is possible for all. But the tutor is faced by unevenness in students' contributions to the discussion, and perhaps too by differences in level between students' actual contributions and the tutor's idea of what those contributions should be. If there is set work to be got through, during a course of seminars, say, is the tutor to go on from week to week behaving as though at each meeting most of the students have adequately learned what it was intended that they should learn? Or should he go back (and perhaps back and back) until the group is on ground where every student has a firm footing and then advance at a pace that ensures that everyone keeps up? This may mean that some important topics are not dealt with at all.

Resorting to either one of these tactics the unskilled tutor may lapse into extremes. On the one hand he teaches more and more when the work progresses slowly.

The tutor sets out those explanations, interpretations and solutions the students were to have sought for themselves. The students have less and less to say as the pace steps up and as they can see that their contributions are not advancing the task or topic as they should; they learn less by active exploration than by imitation. On the other hand since it is difficult to judge when everyone does properly understand a topic the tutor may conclude that the students are in the bert position to decide when to move on, and in what direction, for themselves and he abdicates from control of their work. Are they then learning through discovery? (They may certainly explore ramifications of a topic they do understand rather more thoroughly than the course syllabus allows for!)

The tutor whose discussion groups are already at work might find it profitable to examine them, when he is dissatisfied with what they are achieving, and to try and determine what kind of learning actually is taking place as opposed to what he had intended there to be. It may be possible to reinforce what is being learned, if it is achieving objectives that are of equal value to those the tutor had earlier planned for, but it may be necessary to change the way in which the group's work is organised. Others, including new tutors, might prefer to begin, or to begin again, with first principles - what can be learned in a small group, what can best be learned by particular groups within particular courses - and then to translate these objectives into a course of activities that are practical and realistic in terms of what the students are likely to achieve in specific subjects. Finally comes the question of organisation;

sometimes formal or orderly procedures will best serve a group, sometimes not.

Part I of this booklet is entitled "Orderly Procedures". Common sense suggests that an orderly beginning to small group work best suits novice tutors and inexperienced students. In some subjects tightly organised group work may become progressively less structured as students mature. We speculate on how the organisation of group work in different forms might develop through a degree course, and discuss whether formal rules are necessary to ensure orderly procedures. We next consider in Part II: "Practical arrangements" the practical constraints on a tutor's freedom to organise group work just as he would like. It has to be fitted in with syllabus requirements, timetables, assessment and what is taught elsewhere. In time the tutor will be able to manipulate these constraints to some extent; meanwhile he has to live with them. This section concludes with a brief consideration of who can, does and should do what when it comes to organising group activities.

Part III: "A Preliminary Meeting" is a plea that tutor and students should discuss what the group is going to do, and how their work is to be ordered, before working meetings begin. There is a need for teachers to talk freely to students about what they intend to teach, about how and why they propose to organise their teaching and to let students have some say in making decisions whenever it is possible. This is especially important in small group work where learning is intended to be co-operative and this is the primary reason for

holding a preliminary meeting. Many of the planning activities a tutor normally undertakes alone could be shared with students (though not all the suggestions we make will be proper to all subjects or to all kinds of groups). Through such a preliminary procedural meeting you may succeed in building an image into which each person might feel they had put something of their convictions and aspirations. Such images, diffuse and insubstantial though they may be, do motivate us towards achievement.

The next section of the booklet, Part IV: "Patterns", gives an account of various tried and proven patterns of small group work - the seminar, other structured groups, syndicates, associative discussion groups and tutor-less groups. There are illustrative examples of how small group work can be effectively organised. Finally, in Part V: "Taking Stock" an old hand takes a round look at small group teaching from a different point of view.

PART I

ORDERLY PROCEDURES

1. COMMON SENSE ADVOCATES AN ORDERLY BEGINNING

There are few principles the new tutor can hold to while the common sense that will guide him in practice grows. Consider form to start with. We describe patterns of small group work in Part IV, do not be deluded into thinking these are an embryonic neat taxonomy of forms that can be pinned down by exact descriptions. It will readily be appreciated that an active group is dynamic and unlikely to remain within the bounds of any categorical description throughout its life. The most formal of seminars may be given over to sweeping undirected discussions upon occasion, the most democratic of tutor-less groups can come under the domination of a self-appointed leader. We prefer to suggest that there is a choice that can be made and it is where to locate a group <u>to begin with</u> within a continuum some of whose dimensions are listed below. These are characteristics that describe an educational small group.

* The degree of formality.
* The degree of structuring - the extent to which the group's work and the group's way of working is ordered.

* How directed the group's work is - this includes how authoritarian the tutor's style may be and how closely the group may adhere to the pursuit of pre-determined goals.
* How effectively the group work together - this includes the extent to which learning remains an individual and not a co-operative affair, how much responsibility individuals accept for the group's working, how supportive the group is of each member.
* The extent to which a group's work is centred on its task, with the emphasis on skills, facts and problems; or uses its task to develop judgment and understanding; or through its work on a task is studying the group's interaction or the attitudes and values of its members.

An informal group does not necessarily work effectively together. A high degree of structuring does not preclude an emphasis on the development of individual understanding. Subject-authority and the pursuit of pre-determined goals (for example, learning the structure of the double helix of DNA through work on molecular models) does not demand formality nor an authoritarian teacher.

When you approach small group work you are faced with a set of related decisions. No one can be made without reference to the others. Thus choice of tasks, procedures, modes of assessment, teaching style, time-tabling, teaching materials all relate to each other and to how you see each group developing. We believe that all such decisions

should stem from the first consideration about what kind of learning you hope to bring about. ("A Kind of Learning" therefore precedes this booklet.) Thereafter it is for each tutor to arrive at his own hierarchy of decisions. There is no universally logical or universally acceptable order. Each combination of tutor, subject and group of students has its own priorities and emphasises different values, purposes and constraints.

Common sense advocates that the inexperienced tutor should make an orderly beginning - giving some thought to how he means to proceed and making careful preparation. Common sense also suggests that he conduct his teaching to start with in an orderly manner. Apart from anything else orderly procedures allow progression to be perceived. It is currently thought that new students are best served by structured courses and that a progressive de-structuring in the ways in which they are taught should parallel their increasing experience. May not this hold for tutors too?

2. A GUIDE TO HOW STRUCTURE CAN CHANGE TO MATCH STUDENTS' NEEDS

Curriculum development is now commonplace; much loving care is spent on the construction of courses and the ordering of their content to provide both a coherent development of the subject and to match the intellectual development of students. Should teaching methods show some form of parallel development?

(a) What is the point of tightly organised teaching?

We spoke of progressive de-structuring in the previous

section, it also suggested that wherever uncertainty exists teaching and learning should always be supported by the firmness of a structured situation. Few students follow the same course with the same teachers for their whole career so the progressive de-structuring that, it is hoped, will lead students to independence in learning by the time they graduate is perhaps better thought of as a stepwise progression rather than a smooth one. At every change of step it may be that structure is increased again for a short time in order to make every transition a controlled one. Thus students who are new to an institution, students in transition from general courses to specialist courses and students for whom a discipline is a completely new experience, would all initially be taught in a well-organised, carefully planned and firmly executed fashion. (Similarly a lecturer teaching a very large class seldom allows freedom of choice as to when a class meets, nor does he introduce the uncertainty of permitting discussion of every topic that arouses interest in odd groups of students in his class; he relies on routine and standard practices.)

Structure can be given to a small group either by the tutor's direction of proceedings or by structuring the proceedings themselves. Where the tutor directs the group the extent to which their work is pre-planned and formally carried out changes as the tutor thinks fit; the tutor plays it by ear. A traditional seminar is often conducted in this way and under a skilful tutor a sense of purpose can be maintained while the pace and degree of formality vary. Structuring of the proceedings of every meeting allows the tutor, on

the other hand, to exercise indirect control without appearing to be authoritative. This may be of importance at particular points where one is trying to wean students from dependence and towards accepting some responsibility for their own learning. Students can both resent and shelter under authoritative tutoring; familiar procedures can give them security while freeing them from the tutor's dominance.

Other benefits to be gained from structuring proceedings are that a pattern can be established, such as of the necessary steps in an enquiry within which students can then be given freedom to work as they like. Priorities can be established without the need for the tutor repeatedly having to remind the group of them, students' contributions to the work in hand can be restricted to dealing with one point or one step at a time and personal expression can be kept within bounds. Agreed procedures to which the group strictly adheres can also ensure that energy is directed towards the group's task. For instance, prior agreement as to what the task is to be and how it is to be organised will avoid time being wasted on negotiations about the content and purpose of every meeting as it begins.

This leads on to the question of whether if structured teaching is progressively reduced (so that final year students may in some subjects become not so much taught as guided in independent study) or if teaching is more tightly organised at certain points in a course, so the degree of authority the tutor exercises should wax and wane. Most tutors would agree that university teaching aims at the development of students' independence, the

fostering of their independent judgment; the good teacher like the good parent prepares for his own redundancy. A tutor will not choose form, style, pattern and procedures for a particular course at a particular season, and finding it successful make this his modus operandi for the rest of his teaching life. Whether or not he believes that progressive de-structuring is wise, or that he should re-assert his authority at points where students may be less certain of what they are about, he will look for ways of adapting his methods to match students' intellectual development, in some degree, and to match the development of his courses too.

(b) Is it possible to construct a systematic guide to the development of teaching methods?

There are not, perhaps, an infinite number of possible schemes but many are theoretically possible - we offer one below. Such schemes can only be set out in very general terms for teaching relates too intimately to what is taught for it to be possible to construct, for example, a prescriptive timetable for changing from one form of small group to another. We have based the scheme set out below on the way in which students' attitudes towards learning change as they mature intellectually. Our scheme reflects a schematic development of these changing attitudes amongst students described by Perry[1] and we have related these to the forms of small group organisation we describe in detail in Part IV. They are, briefly:

* a traditional seminar
* an advanced seminar

both of these are conducted along fairly

formal lines with some alternation of disciplined activity with more open-ended discussion;

* a structured group for novices
  this is wholly organised according to clear cut and previously laid down procedures and is directed towards pre-determined goals - the tutor plays a vital role, if only as organiser;
* syndicates
  here sub-groups carry out tasks on their own before presenting them for discussion in the group as a whole. Tasks may be pre-determined but each sub-group organises itself. Discussion later is not always along pre-determined lines though the tutor directs it and sometimes uses it deliberately to describe what could have been as well as to consolidate what has been learned;
* a laboratory tutorial
  which is a model for group work in experimental subjects. Discussion alternates with periods of orderly work on planning and carrying out experiments;
* an associative discussion group
  this group's objectives and procedures are not pre-determined - the students engage in free discussion while the tutor takes a back seat;
* a tutor-less group
  in which the students decide on their own procedures and direct their own activities though they plan ahead and their tasks may

be pre-determined in consultation with the tutor within more or less broad limits.

A developmental pattern for small group teaching

Point of transition	Perry's view of students' attitudes to learning and to knowledge	Form of small group
1. School-University	Right v. Wrong. Learning consists of finding Right Answers. Teacher is Authority.	Structured Group
2. Some time during first or second years.	Students perceive diversity of opinion without accepting its legitimacy. Is knowledge incomplete? Is academic work strictly 'academic'? If answers not right or wrong what are standards for assessment?	Syndicates
3. Second or third year perhaps.	Diversity and uncertainty allowed to be legitimate - knowledge can be personal, contextual, personal ideas can be right. Is this a realm opposed to Authority or does Authority wish them to see things like this?	Associative discussion groups developing into tutor-less groups. Laboratory tutorials.
4. Second and sub-sequent years.	All knowledge and values are contextual. Accept qualitative, relativistic element in reasoning. Rigorous examination of defined areas may become attractive.	Seminars or tutor-less group. Laboratory tutorial.
5. Final year, hons. or post-graduate classes.	Recognise need to take up a position; personal orientation in field of knowledge.	Advanced seminar.

We offer this scheme as a stimulus to wider exploration of the possibilities of small group work; it is often

possible to modify a departmental practice without distorting departmental teaching patterns. The main point we are making is that as a course progresses, and possibly as classes become more manageable in size, while there can be no question of imposing any such scheme as ours on students, awareness of the possibility of changing the way in which group work is organised in response to students' changing needs and attitudes may mean that their academic progress can be facilitated - it may even be possible to accelerate it. Complete changes of form would not always be necessary; sometimes the desired effect might be achieved by quite small procedural changes. We are of course speculating but it is not unprofitable!

(c) Here now is the reasoning behind the scheme.

The first point of transition is when new students come up to university from school. They may be accustomed to dependence on the authority of their teachers so they are not thrust into a situation where everything is ambiguous and they must make their own way through, for example, conflicting data and arguments not open to resolution. But the tutor may wish to avoid establishing personal dominance so he adopts formal procedures instead. The students may be unwilling to give up the authority of Right knowledge and they may be very sure of the rightness of their own views. So they are given opportunities both for disciplined advocacy and disputation and, separately, for the expression of entirely personal views - as Hill's "Learning Thru Discussion" method allows.[2] See page 42. These students may well take it for granted that there are topics that have to be studied and a proper sequence

in which they should be taken. Perhaps, then, the tutor leaves the choice of tasks and topics out of the agenda for his preliminary meeting and negotiates instead over details of the organisation of the classes and of who does what. In preparation for the next transition point, during discussion periods the tutor takes every opportunity to point to widening perspectives and the way in which viewpoints may be determined by the context within which a topic is studied. When students state absolute conclusions he asks them questions; when they reach a consensus view he shows that "We've got it right" can mean "We have agreed".

In a free group, as was shown in "Working Together", members take on roles that are both personality-based and that are defined by an individual's position in the group. Deliberate role-playing may be one of the techniques to which a tutor has introduced his students (this is also described in "Working Together") but it may still be possible to observe instinctive changes of role within the group. For example when an individual's stock of information increases he often changes from being the advocate of a particular view into being a provider of new ideas.[3] Changes like this may be pointers to a group's readiness for the second and third points of transition in our scheme; they may be ready now both for less formal procedures and for more disciplined exchanges of information and ideas. Try syndicates.

In syndicates (see page 47) the students still have the freedom to state their case, as it were, but in a sub-group they may have to face up to real divisions of

opinion. Students who were reticent in the larger group may assert their views and their correct versions here so a sub-group may find the Right Answer more difficult to identify. When the work of several syndicates is consolidated, perhaps in a lecture-discussion by their tutor, they may find there is no Right Answer. Perry would say that "Yet" must be added to that statement and suggests that when students at this stage find they are not graded by relative correctness they assume that they will be on presentation. Now syndicate work allows for the presentation of oral and written reports by the sub-groups. It is when working on these that the students could move towards the next point of transition - the third point in our scheme. When they acknowledge that lack of agreement prevents them making a tidy and presentable report they may come to uphold the validity of their own differing views. (Acknowledgment of this is equivalent to the post-conflict stage of a free group's development as described in "Working Together".) Upholding each other's right to a divergent opinion or interpretation of their joint study they may develop a new feeling of loyalty and here is the realm opposed to Authority's realm of knowledge, as Perry calls it.

Perhaps now the syndicate sub-groups may go on to extend their feelings to the larger group. Interested in each other's views, touching on new issues, developing a sense of how their own attitudes may change, this may be the point where they will get more from free discussions than from pre-determined activities. Eventually, subject to the constraints of their subject and the nature and overall planning of the course they

are taking, such a group may take on the full responsibility of working without a tutor. Doing so it is not impossible that they may also feel the need to return to the discipline of orderly procedures; tutor-less groups are not always unplanned. Free discussion, we have suggested, may best suit students when they first begin to explore the many-sidedness of knowledge and perhaps to fret against the restrictions of the syllabus and the assignments they are set. But when even authorities are admitted to this anti-Authority realm they may be ready for another change.

At the fourth point of transition the tutor supposes students are now interested, again depending on the nature of their subject, in the uses to which their deliberations can be subordinated. They may either continue with tutor-less group work or switch to the formal seminar. Here they can set out with nicety the evidence for and against particular judgments or interpretations of a case in its particular context.

Finally when the students wish to pursue their individual meanings, to seek a distinctive orientation within a field of study, at the fifth point of transition, then the advanced seminar comes into its own. You will find this on page 40. Here the tutor is primus inter pares, the proceedings are formal and disciplined, not to preserve relevance and to minimise expressions of purely personal opinion as in the structured group for novices, but to force students to submit the mass of information they now survey to careful examination and to edit their contributions to the group's exchanges; a free exchange of views and information is not desired.

Each student is given space to make a distinctive contribution and he is expected to begin this with concise statements he is ready to defend and that he personally thinks are worthwhile.

We hope you are now challenging the grounds on which these speculations are based, questioning the validity of proceeding like this, arguing against the practicability of being guided by any such scheme. Our scheme is a questionable statement; there are no Right Answers in teaching nor can there be while normative theories are lacking; teaching is still personal and situational. Nevertheless the speculative theories of those who examine teaching and learning, like the thoughts and experience of earlier generations of teachers, should be given proper consideration. We present you with questions they have provoked; go on asking them yourself and learning may be a livelier experience for your students!

3. FORMAL RULES AND PROCEDURES ARE ONLY A STEP TOWARDS SELF-DISCIPLINE IN GROUPS

Free groups develop conventions as part of their ethos - particular procedures and patterns of behaviour become accepted whilst others are taboo. Educational groups seldom meet often enough to develop an identity and their own implicit rules. This comes through a lengthy process of appraisal, adjustment, conflict and ultimately control and through the establishment of norms resulting from the complex social and personal interaction of the group members and their views. This was discussed in "Working Together".

Essentially educational small groups are contrived situations. The deliberate choice and adoption of rules and conditions may paradoxically allow a group to benefit from the virtues inherent in its social nature more than it might from the full experience of untrammelled interaction. In an educational group interaction may be less than genuine but the deliberate adoption of simple rules and more or less elaborate procedures, appropriate to their tasks and wider purposes, may at least promote interaction at task-level.

Once laid down, perhaps most profitably through discussion between tutor and students, the rules and conventions agreed to - usually to govern procedures - are not to be adhered to like laws. They are always open to modification. Indeed, in time, perhaps quite a short time with some groups, rules may atrophy and the form of procedure change without anyone making a fuss. But it may be wiser, in view of the way a teaching group consciously plays at being a group, to make explicit such new conventions as do evolve and to relate them clearly to the group's tasks.[4] Implicit taboos, too, should be brought into the open.[5] "Why do we always avoid the economic constraints? Have we ever agreed to do so? Do we?"

PART II

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

If it is common sense to recognise that the best way of making a start in small group teaching is probably to have some order in your proceedings it is also common sense to acknowledge that practical constraints may force this upon you. For example small group work is usually part of a wider instructional strategy, there may be agreed overall objectives towards which it is directed and a specific amount of work for the group to get through. Some degree of time-tabling may become essential. Here is a list of some of the usual constraints that may initially confound the new tutor but that he can learn to manipulate for his own purposes.

1. SOME CONSTRAINTS

(a) The logic of course content and development

Small group work may be used on its own to cover part of a course. It will then be necessary to order the content and allocate topics to each meeting that is to be held. Each meeting will necessarily be conducted with a fair amount of discipline and discussion will keep to the point. Traditional seminars are often shaped in this way. For instance the intention may be to develop a survey of a field in subsequent weeks through guided

reading, written assignments and discussion.

(b) Fitting in with other methods

Small group work can be closely integrated with a lecture course, being used to clarify concepts and key issues through discussion or to narrow or widen the focus of the lectures - expanding discussion to cover wider areas and peripheral topics or looking at certain points in close-up. Such groups may be more or less structured, more or less directed, but the content and general shape is determined by the lectures. Similarly, where part of a course is about problem-solving small group work may be restricted to working examples; lectures expound tactics and may incorporate discussion periods. Alternatively, seminars may be held irregularly to discuss difficulties where practice in acquiring skills is provided elsewhere. This can be furnished by programmed material, for example, or by self-instructional systems.

Small groups can be linked with laboratory classes, being used, for instance, on alternate weeks to discuss the work in progress. Or one task may be to determine strategies through discussion, and to design experiments, while another is to manipulate and interpret data and to discuss results in relation to theory. At a more advanced stage free discussions round a theme may be allowed to generate experimental work which is then developed in whatever way seems appropriate.

In association with independent study small groups can be constituted either in response to demand or can be

used systematically. They can be parallel with and instigatory to independent study or used to collate and structure what has been achieved. They can also be used in this way with project work and individualised instruction systems. The small group can also be a forum for discussion of papers that relate independent studies or optional projects to chosen parts of formal courses.

(c) The logic of a task

Some tasks will dictate the shape of individual small group meetings. Thus problem-solving or conceptual analysis may best be handled in discrete steps. Similarly for new students the interpretation of data or the development of a critique may best follow a predetermined sequence of operations.

(d) Time: the proportional distribution of different kinds of activity

The tutor, or the group as a whole, may pre-determine how much time is to be given to separate activities. Thus 10 - 15 minute periods may be given for each student to make a note of his position on an issue, or to make a critical judgment, followed by the handing in of the notes and an equal period of discussion. Or where the anatomy of judgment is the subject of the meeting the period in which judgments are made may be a short one at the beginning of a lengthy open-ended and undirected discussion. Should discussion dominate a meeting or be rationed out in relation to different stages of the group's work? How disciplined should it

be? Should formal provision be made for alternating tightly focussed and free discussion in relation to the logic of the task? (See the pattern for advanced seminars in Part IV.) Time may be needed to build models, work examples, play a game, judge evidence - how much of this should be done by the group as a whole?

(e) Time: sharing out activities

Would it be advantageous to use sub-groups for separate but complementary activities over a period of several meetings? Or would it help to break a group down into buzz-groups (random, off-the-cuff sub-groups with a life of only a few moments) during a particular meeting in order to show up divergent or opposing principles inherent in different approaches to a case-study?

If time or the breadth of associations are tyrannising the group it may be desirable to structure the group in order formally to limit contributions - allowing each student (and the tutor) only so many statements and so many questions. This may be a useful procedure to adopt too where dominance patterns are distorting the group. (The tutor might ask himself how dominant he is.)

Another tactic for breaking up dominance patterns may also be used to increase participation. This is to make specific tasks the responsibility of individuals or sub-groups and formally to allocate time to reports, or other contributions, in full group sessions. (See syndicates in Part IV.)

(f) Other media

The use of technical equipment is going to be a constraint. Interpolating audio-visual material, in particular, will require that the group's work and the timing be fairly orderly. For example, if video-tapes of chemical structures are to be an integral part of a discussion they must be interleaved with some precision. This requires preparation and cannot be a random procedure. Indeed this is often the case whenever you use other media. Equipment must be set up, perhaps it may need to warm up, and a technician's help may be required. Apart from this more material re-arrangements may be necessary. Another room may have to be used. Where a projector or television set is to be used furniture will have to be moved around; the best arrangement is a horseshoe with the tutor at one end - controlling the equipment but not dominating interaction between students. Games-playing may also require the provision of special facilities. Other media and all pre-formed material are used most effectively when the group's proceedings are organised to accommodate them and planned beforehand.

2. ASSESSMENT

For educational groups what counts is not necessarily the values inherent in its task, neither may it be the gains in individual understanding; the pay-off may be assessment. One has to recognise this.

(a) Course work assessment

If you hope that your students will work co-operatively in groups then you must try and fix the pay-off, to use the language of games theory, so that interests coincide. This means setting up a mixed-motive game where there is no one outcome, no particular set of strategies that lead to success, and no one individual can win on his own.(6) Co-ordination is then the only way to reach a position where each member can maximise his own gain. This point must be emphasised. There is no possibility of maintaining fully co-operative work if the only assessment is of individual essays. Erstwhile happy groups, exploring ideas together and helping each other, can become aggressive individuals, watchful, reserved and keeping their ideas to themselves.(7)

If the real outcome for your students is going to be graded assessment then consider the possibilities of group grading for group projects.(8) Or work out ways in which students can contribute partial assignments to the group. These can build up a common core of understanding of central principles while subsequent work for assessment can be individual assignments that are tangential to the central themes.

There are other kinds of assessment to consider too. Assessment of performance in the group is commoner in the United States than it is elsewhere. If such assessment takes the form of grades that reflect a normal distribution of scores someone has to get the C's and D's and others will make sure that they do. Group performance is often rated and incorporated in overall marks

that include test marks and those for written assignments too. Peers may be a much under-used educational resource[9] but many students will be glad they remain so. The deeper competitive assumptions of our society are always against co-operative work.[4] Enormous care must be taken to minimise them.

(b) Examinations

Where examinations dominate it must be demonstrated that the more complex skills to be learned in small groups can be learned, are being taught and will be examined. It is interesting to note how changing patterns of science graduate employment are leading to demands for more flexible skills and pleas for reduction in the more easily assessed recall-of-knowledge component in examinations.[10] Where ability to recall and organise facts and principles determines grades small groups may be neglected. But with the use of examination questions that require skill in interpreting data, in ignoring deliberately planted redundant data, the exercise of practical criticism, the construction of logical argument from unfamiliar material and the designing of problem-solving strategies then there could be greater engagement in the small group. Examination questions of this kind would also provide lots of material to use as common ground for groups to work on!

(c) Feedback to students; evaluating their own progress

Wherever possible, do what you can towards giving students tangible results from their work other than grades. If mastery and control of curriculum and

assessment procedures are the only base they have for self-esteem their aspirations may be reduced to becoming good operators of the system. You may be happy with that. But if you hope to foster individual and personally rewarding learning you must give students some means of judging their competence and the individual value of their work. "People come to a place like this for knowledge. It is very difficult to work towards something as intangible as knowledge. You do not know when you are succeeding".(11) Abercrombie(12) speaks of competitiveness becoming "a spice that enhances individual differences" and of the possibility of assessment by students of their own and other's work being integrated into the educational process. She discusses the practical experience of using small groups for students to learn to assess their own work. The yardsticks they apply are not only academic ones but tests that are closer to the realities of the outside world in which they will work. If you think that the days when students will contribute to their own formal assessment are far, far distant consider, nonetheless, how valuable informal self-assessment in groups could be.

(d) Feedback for the tutor; guiding their progress

It is not competitive for the tutor to evaluate performance if this is not for assessment purposes. Compare this with marking essays where it is not uncommon to prepare checklists of what one anticipates as the content of written assignments. One can also list virtues and defects in ordering, style and presentation against which to evaluate individual performances. Similarly it is also a simple matter to plot the steps

by which you anticipate a group will move towards its objectives. One can keep a running chart of how each student progresses personally in respect of his level of contributions, ability to learn from different kinds of experience, adjustment to group work, mastery of specific skills and so forth. Such lists would not be a military order of the course but a back-room service activity for the tutor alone. The maps will not show where the students should go but provide points of reference to guide the tutor to an understanding of exactly where the students are. The tutor's time and attention are always competed for by an infinite number of other concerns and activities. Systematic efforts to record and evaluate students' progress, and the blocks at which they stumbled, may at least inculcate habits of observation and objective appraisal. It is in any case common sense to look for all kinds of feedback and to use it as a basis for more thoughtful guidance.

3. DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

Should there be divisions of labour? Here is one way of tackling the question.

Any tutor still unsure about how democratic he means to be will have to decide whether there should be any division of labour before he is ready to ask what such divisions might be and who is to determine them. On the other hand consideration of the practical business of preparing for, say, seminars, with an eye to inviting students to take part in planning them and organising them may decide the would-be democrat to do it all himself; would the students take time to do their share

properly?

Consider these points.

* Partial democracy is all many tutors ever achieve; democratic form is easier to create than its reality.
* What do you know of your students - are they at all keen, are they ready to take on responsibilities?
* Partial democracy can be a deliberate choice; try limited transfers of responsibility but introduce them right at the beginning of a course rather than edging the students gently over towards agreeing to do this or that as the course proceeds.

The point behind this last recommendation is that the inexperienced tutor should try to keep working meetings as free as possible from debates about procedure; many people do prefer talking about working to work itself! The canny tutor decides by himself what areas of choice there are in which the students can legitimately, to his mind, help make decisions and then he sets up a framework within which choices can be made. The forethought and planning are his; the students make the immediate decisions. And the tutor sets aside a meeting at the beginning of a course at which all these choices are made and discussed.

Take as an example the choice of tasks or activities, the choice of topics for a discussion group. The tutor can make up a wide list of possible choices taking into consideration not just the requirements of the syllabus, curriculum development criteria, the students' interests, what is taught elsewhere and the way in which how he

presents the list can demonstrate the links between topics; but also bearing in mind the practical questions of how much time is available, the pattern of course-work assessment and the resources available. He chooses tasks for inclusion in his list with thought, too, for how suitable they are for group work. The tutor avoids tasks that an individual could manage successfully on his own; better by far to undertake something that can be broken down into several interdependent or complementary lesser tasks. Similarly topics for discussion would ideally be open to interpretation at more than one level and contain the seeds of more than one contentious issue.

Given this list of possible activities, and some explanation of the grounds on which they were selected, the whole group can then share in working out the exact line they are going to follow, the particular approach they are going to make to this part of the course and choose tasks and topics accordingly. These will not always come directly from the tutor's list but they will be akin to his selection and within the framework he has provided.

The choice of tasks and topics, then, is a simple one that students can share in, others are the choice of rules and procedures and the allocation of separate parts for individual students to play when this is necessary.

The general question of roles and responsibilities

Let us look at the more general question of roles and responsibilities next. There is a sense in which

short-lived teaching groups are not real groups but caricature the way people work together in small groups in real situations. A group that meets probably no more than ten or twelve times, for an hour at a time, cannot develop, as a free group does, through stages of appraisal and conflict to the point where it has an identity and the confidence that enable it to control its own working and to be both co-operative and productive in what it does. In "Working Together" we described this kind of development and the way that some of the features of a mature group can be grafted onto one that is undeveloped. Role-playing is one such strategy detailed in "Working Together". Briefly, it involves the identification of roles essential to a group's efficient working, such as time-keeping, and the general recognition that everyone shares the responsibility for keeping an eye on the clock.

From time to time someone does therefore remind the others that progress is slow or that there is time in hand to go into something more thoroughly. No-one is cast in a specific role; they are interchangeable. No one person always does what he is best at doing, as might be the case in a fully developed free group; in a learning situation one wants to avoid fixation of function. Deliberate role-playing, then, is one of the strategies a group uses, but what of more general responsibilities and roles that the tutor perhaps cannot share?

One could say that only he can be the group's trainer and adviser on group skills and practical procedures; he will hope that students acquire expertise in these

areas themselves in time. He is, too, the resource expert; here again it is likely that with time students will research topics and find things out for themselves. He is the course director, formally organising meetings and assignments and arranging the term's programme; it is difficult to imagine students willingly sharing these reponsibilities. Lastly the tutor is often the course assessor and this is a role that students will never normally take over.

The responsibility for preparation must be shared

Look next at one responsibility that tutor and students always share and that is to prepare for group work. Seminars and tutorials are often less formal than a lecture but a tutor cannot get by on his wits and experience. If anything his preparation needs to be more thorough than it is for a lecture. For example, when the group is to discuss topics the tutor should be aware of most of the directions the discussion can take, whether or not he directs it, and he is not concerned only with the particular line he has chosen to take in presenting the subject. The tutor must also be alert to the need to be responsive to feedback; feedback is immediate in this situation and the tutor should be alert to the possible need to change the pattern of the group's work - perhaps to change procedures, to have other tasks and topics in reserve, to be prepared in extreme instances to change to another method. He must watch out for the ways in which individual students' difficulties come to the surface and make provision for whatever support or guidance or further private study is needed. It has been suggested

that the closer one comes to the student and his problems then the more time and energy 'teaching' will absorb![13] In addition to himself preparing for teaching the tutor must sort out the inter-related provision he must make for assignments and assessment of all kinds, common ground for each meeting and the students' preparative work.

The first consideration in respect of students' preparation is how much can you realistically expect them to do? Preparation is closely related to assessment. If course work is not assessed the work done will obviously diminish. Examinations may become the only place where students actually use their knowledge and the syllabus will define the work they do. If examination syllabuses discourage personal exploration the demand for essays can be equally restrictive. Frequent essays on prescribed topics can induce a kind of tunnel vision. A student's involvement in meetings will be restricted to 'my bit' and the garnering of grains to add to 'my essay'. This is hardly co-operative and ideally the small group is a co-operative form of learning.

It would be a foolish tutor who failed to recognise the real contingencies that determine what the students will actually undertake by way of preparation. One of these is the way in which demands on their time escalate as term progresses. Almost all resort to a kind of "selective neglect".[14] Initially they will, of course, tend to neglect what will not be assessed. And they may only attend seminars where they are required to present work for assessment orally. Other more co-operative activities will only be attended where they are a rich source of material to go into assignments. All kinds

of work for assessment may be got out independently, even where activities are shared. Experimental work will be skimped or rationed out if results can be copied, discussion of experimental design and strategies will be spurned if recipes are available. Even assignments may be neglected if material is not readily available. No-one is going to give up time for repeated searches for essential reading. Special readers can be made up for purchase if they cannot be distributed freely, and multiple copies made of particular papers. But this cannot be done on impulse and both costs and departmental protocol may work against it.

Any effort that goes into finding a variety of forms of preparation for your students is likely to be repaid especially when there is competition for their attention and they have repeated reading lists, more and more essays in hand. Note too that it can really help new students if you ask them to prepare work in a variety of precisely defined forms. It is far from easy to switch from reporting to making substantive comments, for instance. It can be particularly difficult to make any restatement of views from written material of high quality. Where no loose ends are visible, no rough edges, students may find no purchase for their thoughts. Ask them to bring a single question or to think out an opposing viewpoint to one stated opinion. Ask for a list of main points in respect of an aspect that is not dealt with specifically in the text they are studying.

Will you always expect students to make individual preparation? They come from a variety of backgrounds.

Close co-operation with someone of a different cast of mind may be a fruitful experience. Students can work in pairs or form impromptu groups of three or four. (An extension of this tactic is the syndicate method described in Part IV.) If they wish to do so such groups could embark on a mini-project relevant to the formal development of a course. Perhaps some students would like to prepare and circulate a series of brief papers forming in time a folder of discontinuous but related topics. This could, too, be a more comprehensive survey that develops stepwise and covers those issues that interested them most or that came to seem of greatest importance. This could be the foundation for discussions or be used again by those who prepared them, or others, as material for later essays that demand re-consideration of the material from another standpoint. Re-writing and re-ordering material is a learning experience too seldom provided by undergraduate work.

A final responsibility that tutor and students share is for consciousness of the need for self-evaluation. It is a scholarly discipline to attend as carefully to what one says oneself as one does to what others say and to judge one's own contributions by dispassionate criteria. Neither tutor nor students will assume that they have privileged access to the truth or freedom from criticism and students should not assume that tutors do!

PART III
A PRELIMINARY MEETING

The literature is full of testimonials to the gains in interest, enthusiasm and achievement for those students who are engaged in all that goes on in small groups from the very beginning. There is no justification for making teaching a mystique; why not use the first meeting to talk with the students about how the work is to be tackled?

We present a list of the things one might include in such a preliminary meeting. What you choose from it, or what you bring in from elsewhere, will depend on course constraints, resource limitations, your personal objectives, bias and confidence. The experience you and your students have already had of small groups will influence you as will their backgrounds and attitudes. The list is not to be thought of as prescriptive or chronological.

Formalities. The tutor can explain what will be expected of the students in the matter of assignments, preparative work, attendance. He will describe the methods of assessment and the rationale behind them. He will describe arrangements for meetings, where to hand in written work, how to contact him, how work will be marked and to what

criteria. He will define his authority in unambiguous terms. Whatever can be openly discussed should be discussed. Think about this. Are you too restrictive?

Context. The tutor outlines the course structure (this could be a handout), relates this part of it to the rest, discussed what is taught by colleagues, why the course has been set up this way, how students can influence it now or for next year, how vacation reading or private study can be planned to fill out the work of the group.

Objectives and ambitions. However authoritarian you may be by choice this is an area that should always be openly discussed. Some understanding of both the broad aims and short term goals of their work is essential to your students. In addition, if they feel they have participated in setting the goals, defining the aspirations of the group and setting the standards of what they are going to do, they will be far more interested and far more likely to participate in it.

Training in group work. It should be explained that the fruits of small group work cannot be harvested until everyone has acquired some skill in the method. (If the tutor sees himself as one of the inexperienced he should say so.) Refer to the dual nature of groups, they are concerned with academic work but are expected to be co-operative. The social nature of the group and the tensions and cohesiveness that result from interaction may benefit their work. When completely disregarded they may damage it. If it is to be beneficial then everyone must try to find ways of contributing to its smooth running. Give a brief analysis

of the way in which you see the roles and responsibilities you have and they have in this particular group. Discuss it. If you intend to be completely directive or as unobtrusive as possible, say so, explain why and describe how ritualising your role may help to make it acceptable. Describe the roles they can take up. With experience they will see what needs to be done and will move in and out of various roles. Emphasise how role-playing is a feature of all free, mature groups.

Bring this up again after you have talked about tasks and procedures. It is possible to circulate handouts, booklets such as these and other straightforward accounts of working in groups or to give out a short reading list. It may be possible to precede this meeting by showing video-tapes of small groups at work.

<u>This meeting is the first stage of establishing the desired pattern of interaction</u> (compare it with the first appraisal stage of the free group in "Working Together"). Everyone will be holding back, appraising, inhibited, curious. To precipitate interaction the tutor can say something about himself, his interests, his relation to the mainstream of departmental thought and activities, what he would like to bring into the group.

It is entirely appropriate for you to give some account of how socially expressive behaviour can be subordinated to the group's purposes. With discussion groups in particular something can be said about the need to be alert to the personal values element in views. "Some of you will not like some of the things that are said

to you. In a working group it is essential that we come to appreciate that intellectual criticism of ideas is not a personal matter." Sometimes (as in the structured group for novices in Part IV) time is specifically set aside for personal exchanges. In any group it can be said, "Some of you will feel strongly about things that come up. In order not to interrupt the rational development of the work in hand, I would like to suggest that we set aside a few minutes at the end of the meeting to give everyone a chance to express personal opinions. What do you think?"

In groups where interaction is fostered as part of the learning process (see "A Kind of Learning") you could point out that a certain hypocrisy can creep in. A pattern of behaviour can become unproductively artificial when individuals indulge in behaviour that uses the group for their own gratification. Point out that undirected groups always in time exercise their own control of behaviour but here one must by-pass this by exercising restraint.

Tasks and topics. This was discussed in Part II. The tutor could explain what tasks will be used for and what they will be expected to achieve. (See "A Kind of Learning".) Then there is the question of deciding who is to choose tasks and topics. The choice is seldom completely open. At one end of the spectrum, more commonly in the humanities, small discussion groups can meet without a pre-determined focus for their activities at all. The group generates its own topics, everyone participating equally in the choice. The tutor too may make suggestions; "What I would like to

include would be ...", though the group will feel free to reject them. This can be most productive and enjoyable. Where mastery is of no concern it does not matter whether every thread is followed to its logical conclusion; anything can be relevant. Where no-one has decided where they are going the exploration of ideas and growth of understanding may honestly occur.(5)

But more often choices are made beforehand, even though this may be only at the end of the preceding meeting, in order to allow some preparation. Where activites involve practical work, the practising of skills, or a demonstration of some kind, forward planning is essential. However students can still take part in the planning. At the far end of the spectrum the choice is made by the tutor alone.

Where students do share in deciding what the work is to be and how it is to be organised they may need guidance on what is suitable for the methods of group work. They may also need to be given examples of the kind of activity that is appropriate and some demonstration of the level at which they will be expected to treat a subject.

There is no point in trivialising a subject in order to engage the slower students, this may be counter-productive, but when, for instance, there is a problem central to the issue to be discussed, or a problem to be diagnosed through the examination of a series of case-studies, then it must recognisably <u>be</u> a problem to most of the students. Similarly a topic for discussion must be important enough to merit examination in their eyes but it must also be a worthwhile contribution to their study

of the subject as well.

Procedures. Look at Part I of this booklet again and then at the patterns in Part IV. What procedures would suit this group best? Describe the various possible ways of organising the work that do seem suitable to the group and discuss them. Set the broad limits of what is practicable and then see whether the final decision about working arrangements can emerge from discussion. The agreed procedures can be written up on the blackboard or someone can make a note of it to be copied. Have you heard of contracts?

Input. Apart from the detailed preparation for each meeting which we mentioned in Part II a small group needs a broad foundation of knowledge. Some explanation can be given of the breadth of background they might ideally aim at covering. In practice they will not manage it; it is usual to give out reading lists, annotated as to closeness to the backbone of the course-work, limitations, possible uses. Would some of them like to research some of the areas to be covered, circulating abstracts or reading lists before the topic comes up? Discuss too the need for common ground on which to base the activities of specific meetings, the kind of preparation you have in mind for them to make, how much time you think this will take up. They may wish to put forward alternative forms of preparation.

PART IV
PATTERNS

1. THE SEMINAR (FOR THE TRADITIONAL)

The seminar has a long and respectable history. Characteristically each student in turn, perhaps at subsequent meetings, reads a paper. The medieval tutor as master scholar then used to discuss the paper with the student, probing his views and demanding their justification. Other students then used to join in the discussion. This still goes on.

Problems arise when after questioning of the presenter the tutor finds no-one else comes forward with contributions. Students tend to do no preparation for seminars outside their own papers. Tutors are always more ready to fill gaps than students, and seminars can thus degenerate into an informal lecture. General techniques for sustaining discussion are described in "Participatory Discussion". In seminars the discussion is commonly directed by the tutor. Discussion may be livelier if he reserves his own comments on the paper and asks students to contribute theirs first. Thus A reads a paper, B is asked to make a concise statement of what A said, C is asked to comment on this résumé. Then

perhaps the tutor invites other views. If they are not forthcoming he may revert to asking individuals to make specific observations. At various points the tutor can draw the discussion together, suggest what his own views might be, but not present them as dogma, and ask again for specific comments or for particular individuals to assess the validity both of the tutor's summary or of the original paper.(15)

Always give everybody time to respond before drawing others in. You can sample opinion by a straw poll and sample comprehension by asking someone to recapitulate a main point.

The new tutor should familiarise himself with ploys - Seminarmanship. Note in particular that where members' preparation and contributions are restricted to their own topic the most ambitious amongst them will be quick to divert discussion to his area while playing down others. And there is the maintenance of differentials - "someone has to get the 'C's' and 'D's'".(2)

Seminars generally show a developmental curricular pattern relating to each other and to the lectures with which they are often closely integrated. Before asking for student essays or papers a meeting might profitably discuss the scope and balance of what is to be covered. How important is it that they give more attention to the central aspects of a subject rather than to the less well-explored periphery? In reading round and writing about a small topic a student may reach the threshold of knowledge in that area. A wide review will allow

him to investigate different approaches to cognate problems.[16]

Long papers may be too informed and too authoritative to generate any discussion. If in addition they are badly presented their effect may be depressing. The rightful place for the traditional seminar may be as the main teaching method for post-graduates.

For undergraduate seminars it may be more productive to ask for short papers and two or three students may be asked to present such papers on related themes at the same meeting. More general preparation can also be made. Students could be asked to come with a precis of a relevant article or chapter from a book, a brief critique of a related viewpoint and so forth. These could be prepared as notes to be handed in beforehand for the tutor to look over and feed into the discussion as he thinks appropriate.

In all seminar work where students are expected to present their work in a more or less formal way you should bear in mind the relatively greater importance of their preparative work. Learning, in respect of the content of their work, mainly takes place before they come to the seminar. During the seminar they are less likely to acquire new knowledge. The presence of an audience facilitates the performance of tasks that depend on already learned skills and recall of previously learned material. But the audience may inhibit acquisition of new material.[6] Less that is new will be learned in front of an audience and there may also be a change in the quality of intellectual contributions. In the

presence of others there is a tendency for individuals to express fewer idiosyncratic thoughts, more moderate judgments and to make more commonplace and popular associations.[17] These effects are the result of social stimuli competing successfully with the demands of intellectual tasks. However they become less and less significant as a group matures. In trying to combat such effects one must look for ways of developing group cohesiveness and harmony as early as possible and consider ways of accelerating the processes through which groups settle down to working effectively together.

The preparation for a seminar should therefore be substantial[18] if you intend to use it in the traditional manner. Whenever students are required to present work to their tutor in front of their fellows it is unlikely that one will succeed in engaging the group in free and exploratory discussions at the same time. A traditional seminar is essentially a disciplined dialectic[16] and attempts to increase its flexibility are often mishandled.[19] Give students as much freedom as you can therefore in the choice of topics and issues they are to work on; encourage exploration and the rewarding and arduous process of enquiry during their preparation for seminars.

2. AN ADVANCED SEMINAR (FOR THE SCHOLARLY)

Advanced seminars may fall short of their potential, for "profound, comprehensive and critical discussion", when inadequately disciplined. They may relapse into superficiality and verbosity. Professor Nisbet[20] has practised a carefully planned procedure that prevents

wordiness or excessive contributions of a specialised and factual kind. It is characterised by intensive preparation and the alternation of free and disciplined discussion (see "Participatory Discussion".)

A preliminary meeting is devoted to explanation of the procedure and discussion of a wide list of fields of study presented by the tutor. Each student chooses one. In subsequent meetings the tutor acts as primus inter pares. The procedure for each student is as follows. Within his field he must prepare 6 statements truly worth making (there is no requirement to cover the field). Each statement must be a single sentence. It is hoped that they will be clear, succinct, important, controversial and expressive of personal beliefs based on study, experience and reflection. The students are asked to avoid platitudes, trivialities, and abstractions. A copy is prepared for all the other members of the group with references to relevant literature.

Each student is given two successive meetings for his field. At the first one he presents his statements during a 20-minute talk, this is followed by free discussion. At the second meeting he begins by reminding the group of the points made last time and perhaps amends his statements. He then goes through the list sequentially, looking for consensus; agreement on whether each should be accepted or amended. The group try to achieve a group formulation reconciling varying opinion and principles. At the next meeting, before a second student begins his presentation, the first student reads 'minutes', giving each statement in its final form with lists of subscribers to each statement and of dissenters. A

minute book is kept throughout.

Spare meetings are always kept in hand so that supplementary topics can be covered as need arises. This kind of seminar should only be used where the students can be expected to achieve a thought-out position and to exercise judgment based on informed opinion. The seminar procedures are a device for encouraging further thought and conciseness of expression, and ensure that each student has his work constructively and critically examined.

3. A STRUCTURED GROUP (FOR NOVICES)

The apparent dearth of ground rules and conventions in seminars makes it difficult for novices (both tutors and students) to know how best to proceed. They may never consider whether anything more is demanded of them than the classroom habits that they bring from their last academic home. The LTD method (Learning Thru Discussion, Hill)[2] is a well-thought-out systematic approach that aims at resolving precisely this problem.

The method is centred on a 'Group Cognitive Map', described as 'a procedural tool which outlines an orderly sequence that a group should follow in order to learn from discussion". As described in Hill's book the method has been designed for subject-matter mastery. (It is open to re-drafting for other purposes.) Thus for studying and evaluating a text the Map guides the group through Definition of Terms and Concepts, Identification of Themes and Sub-topics, Discussion of

Major Themes, Integration of the Material, on to Evaluation of the Author's Presentation. Great emphasis is placed on what the author has to say rather than on the opinions of the students. Provision is made for the expression of their personal reactions only at the end. It is often the case that after covering the other steps their criticism becomes more constructive and has less affective loading. The method assumes the existence of suitable study material available to all and read prior to the meeting.

The social nature of the group is not ignored. Group roles and desirable member skills are specified and there is a list of the criteria for a good group learning situation. The thinking behind the details of this part of the LTD approach consistently follows that of the authorities we too have cited. Leadership roles are distributed amongst the group, task roles and group maintenance roles are described and there is strong emphasis on the need for flexibility, movement into and out of roles and for readiness to modify any part of the scheme to meet individual needs.

It is not supposed that small group skills can be achieved at a stroke. There is a need for training. A preliminary meeting discusses every aspect of the plan so that, in effect, everyone participates in giving the tutor a mandate to put into effect an agreed method of proceeding. The suggested model also includes a final step, Evaluation of Group Performance, that Hill thinks is essential. This American model is one worth careful study. Its chief virtues are that it gives students an opportunity to play at 'being a group', it

sharpens the clarity of their purposes and gives them a clear perception of progress. Unsystematic groups often have trouble pacing themselves. (One notices how they beat to death topics that everyone understands.) Following the route of a systematic Map a time-table is worked out and pacing becomes a matter of routine. At the same time the group learns to recognise the need for order and the distinctive steps by which one arrives at an objective evaluation of material.

4. A TUTOR-LESS GROUP (FOR THE EXPERIENCED)

It would be a mistake to suppose that a tutor-less group is also completely informal and unstructured by definition. This is not so. Tutor-less groups can be any kind of group and meet for any of the purposes and activities that we have covered in these booklets. We cannot therefore give a short and tidy account of their procedures. Their only truly distinctive feature is the absence of a tutor and it may always be necessary for the group to meet with their tutor from time to time in order to test their views and conclusions against his more penetrating analyses and questions. This is because the group may arrive at working standards which, being set low to accommodate every member of the group, are not high enough for the course requirements.

Leaderless groups may founder when through lack of discipline and inexperience they fail to pace themselves properly, they lose sight of their perspectives and they begin to feel they are not getting anywhere. They face all the ordinary problems of group work as well. We would therefore suggest that they are most likely to

be productive when those taking part are experienced in small group work to start with. Note too that not all types of student enjoy tutor-less groups. It may be that personality factors do relate to achievement with this form of group.[21]

In a tutor-less group the students control pace, manner, intensiveness, extensiveness, relevance and levels of participation. They are free to move into and out of roles, playing whatever parts they like. But they also have to learn to fit in with each other's patterns of working and to sort out the usual stresses and tensions a small group may produce. Clearly when they are successful the group will benefit from increased confidence and a developing sense of responsibility for their own learning. They will cease to look to authority for that validation of views that adds weight to only some contributions in tutored groups.[22] And they will cease to expect 'authority' to put things right when the group is not functioning well. Lack of the tutor's support and resources within the group makes it particularly important that there should be no skimping of preparation of material and other supportive measures outside the group. While it may be necessary for the tutor to share in overall planning of the work the group is to cover they can decide what is to be done each week by themselves. The preliminary meeting takes on added importance. It is absolutely necessary that a tutor-less group have no doubts about what they intend to do and why, what parts of their work will be assessed and so forth. It is essential that they have systematic work to do. The discussion of rules and procedures must be more thorough than usual. It has

been suggested that 2 - 3 preliminary meetings be held and this can help inexperienced groups.[23]

The greatest benefit for students of working without a tutor is that they themselves have more time to talk. In strictly academic terms there may be an advantage to students working in tutor-less groups when it comes to wrestling with complex conceptual material.[24] In other work they may or may not do as well as conventional groups; much may depend on the quality of their preparation, the support they are given and the enthusiasm and general availability of their tutor. Still, Powell[25] does report that students' verbal contributions in tutor-less groups do improve in respect of their intellectual quality as well as in their frequency.

5. A LABORATORY TUTORIAL (FOR SCIENTISTS)

Laboratory classes are obviously potential tutorials. Here is an example of a small group laboratory tutorial. It is organised with the intention of stimulating both a questioning and a systematic approach to experimental work. It further emphasises the need to maintain a theoretical perspective and to discuss results in the light of this.

The account we give here is based on a particular account by Field[26] where students as individuals carried out separate experiments relating to a general theme which the group could discuss. There is a preliminary meeting, at the start of each phase of the course, to allocate experiments, set time limits, discuss background, experimental design, etc. Practical instructions are

given as handouts. Each group of 4 - 5 students has a supervisor (a member of staff or a graduate demonstrator) who chairs their discussions and works closely with each student to help plan experiments and to assist with techniques.

The group then combine their results and discuss them within their small group. Outside data are brought in (material too time-consuming or technically too difficult for the group to obtain for themselves) to provide as proper basis for theorising. After the discussion each student deduces what he can in the way of theoretical conclusions and writes a review to support them. There is a requirement that individuals both report their experimental results orally to their group and make the written report and review referred to above. This will be expected to give an integrated account of the whole group's work and not be restricted to reporting. Their supervisor is there to give personal guidance on how to work towards personal interpretations.

Each phase concludes with a seminar. Data are examined and individual interpretations and reviews are discussed. Students seem to find this interesting and take an active share in what goes on. The group then goes on to explore what manifestations might be anticipated from their joint conclusions in respect of the first stage of experimental work. As well as theoretical inferences they thus go on to design a further set of experiments.

6. SYNDICATES (FOR INDEPENDENTLY-MINDED COLLABORATORS)

This technique [27,28] is often used as a way of using

small group teaching methods to best advantage in larger than average groups. Essentially it involves breaking down groups (of 12 - 20 or 30 students) into sub-groups of 4 - 5 and setting each sub-group (or syndicate) tasks that are joint assignments. Sometimes these will be specific to each syndicate; sometimes all syndicates will be tackling the same tasks. This technique was developed for use with the kind of task that involves reading, writing and discussion. See Tyrrell[29] for an example of a similar pattern of teaching in a science department.

A preliminary meeting is used to describe the procedures, to allocate assignments and to set up the syndicates. Sometimes this meeting is partly given over to some kind of joint activity - a film, an experiment, a field visit - which is intended to be the kind of vivid, shared experience on which working relationships may be founded. It may also serve as a demonstration of how personal experience can have some bearing on abstract discussion of a subject.

An essential feature of syndicate work is that students form views and deduce principles for themselves, from reading and their shared work, before they are confronted by the tutor and his authorised versions. The small number in each syndicate means everyone can take a full and active part in that work. Having an assignment makes their reading purposeful and improves their critical faculties.

Each syndicate brings its task to completion by the writing of a joint report or preparation of notes for an

oral report. In the first instance their papers are handed in together with papers from all the other syndicates and the tutor may summarise their conclusions in a lecture, correcting misconceptions and extending the subject beyond what the students have presented. His purpose is to consolidate what the students have learned. Plenary discussion may follow. Where oral reports are made each syndicate may present theirs in turn to the full group, or each may in turn hold a panel discussion within the full group. The tutor then again draws their reports together and subjects their views on the topics they have been working on to a more rigorous academic discipline, while also giving a more general account and review of the subject. Sometimes he may invite experts to come and comment on the students' work.

During syndicates' discussions the tutor's role is that of counsellor. He may circulate amongst the groups checking for accuracy and asking questions to provoke further enquiry or to open up new issues. As he goes round the groups each group may take on that pattern of ebb and flow, of alternating free and disciplined discussion that Nisbet feels to be so valuable in the Advanced Seminar - though in the case of syndicates, of course, the disciplined parts of the discussion are tutor-centred.

This form of group work is one way of engineering participation and fostering student independence. Many students enjoy syndicate work thoroughly and gain from doing so. In order to reduce the opposing effect of competitive assessment it may be possible to use group

assessment for syndicate work: every student in a syndicate is given the same mark - there are occasional reports of this kind of assessment procedure to be found.[8]

7. AN ASSOCIATIVE DISCUSSION GROUP (FOR THE PATIENT)

This kind of group has no formal procedure. It really is essential to read transcripts or analytic accounts of group meetings to see quite how they work. They provide an environment in which students explore and try to clarify the assumptions underlying the way in which they make judgments, for example. The informality of these groups demands a corresponding firmness of structure in their arrangement. They meet regularly, in the same place and at the same time. The setting is unvarying. (This account and all quotations are from Abercrombie.)[30]

At the first meeting "The Conductor establishes the frame of reference within which the group will work by stating its aims briefly but as clearly as possible". This will be repeated upon occasion at later meetings when the aims can conveniently be related to the current conversation and can be expressed in the students' vocabulary. One aim may be to encourage students to talk freely and by learning from the responses of their peers to acquire an awareness of their own habitual attitudes and "hopefully, learn to command a richer repertoire of ways of behaving from which to choose for specific purposes".

The discussion that is the form that interaction takes

is disciplined by its relation to a particular subject or task. In anatomising judgment a first step is an act of judgment. Time may be set aside at the beginning for students to study tissue samples, photographs of sites, a philosophical statement. Formed judgments are then submitted to comparison with those of their peers. The conductor must demonstrate the kind of behaviour and responses that foster self-expression and self-exposure. This is not to suppose that personal matters are the group's concern. The exposure is that of attitudes and values that bias intellectual perception and of personal ways of approaching and looking at a task. The conductor uses most of the techniques described in "Participatory Discussion", refraining from interpreting and evaluating what students say. He helps them to find their own meanings, clarify their own statements and recognise the patterns and divergencies that emerge. But he does this without in any way directing or probing, or impressing his own views upon the group.

PART V
AN OLD HAND COMMENTS

I'm always worried when I hear a fellow university teacher say "It's all right; it is only a tutorial." Not for nothing do many universities make lectures optional but tutorials compulsory. In so far as university teaching consists of putting mind in touch with mind, of juxtaposing one interpretation with an equally plausible alternative, with giving the new generation of scholars the experience of drawing what conclusions may reasonably be drawn from ascertained data, it is in the small group that such developments most often take place. If we are to get full value from our group teaching we have to prepare for it as assiduously as we prepare for a lecture. We certainly play our students false if we rely solely on "wit and experience". It could be argued that a tutorial or other small group teaching session calls for more preparation than that needed for a lecture of equivalent length. In the lecture we "call the shots"; we determine which lines shall (and, therefore, which shall not) be pursued. In a tutorial, even in one fairly tightly programmed, there is no knowing what facet of

the subject will be illuminated by the searchlight of the students' minds.

Perhaps the greatest hazard which the beginner has to face is that of turning the small group session into another lecture period. Certainly it was the writer's main fault till he asked one of his more helpful students to bring a stop-watch along! The powerful lecturer must be particularly aware of this danger. There are times when it is difficult not to do the work for them; "Now look - if A, and we've already ascertained B, then it can only be C or D. Since C is impossible because of E then it must be D. It's simple really." The pencils will fly along the page; the solution will be copied down; progress will be made and another item may be ticked off the list. But the students have been deprived of the opportunity of puzzling their way themselves to the solution. The "solution" written now in the notebooks could have been a hand-out. There are times to be reticent; there are times to be (or to pretend to be) puzzled. "Let's see now. Where have we got to? What was that point you made at the start Dave? Celia's contribution seemed to contradict it - or did it? I'm not sure that it did....." and so on. The less intelligent the students the more important it is not to do their thinking for them.

Another aspect of group work which calls for careful pre-meditation is the difficult art of bringing in the less forward student without it being too obvious that this is what is being stage-managed. We certainly do not wish to strive for mathematical equivalence in quantity

of participation in group work. Some naturally wish to talk more; some naturally wish to talk less. What is more to the point some may learn better by talking and some by listening.

Those who prefer listening must, however, be gentled into participation for one of the general social skills which a university seeks to develop is that of communicating effectively with one's colleagues. It could be said that this skill is highly relevant to the future occupations of most of our students.

The unwillingness of some of our students (including some of the most able) to participate vocally is, perhaps, a reflection of a system of secondary education which has always emphasised the written rather than the spoken form of communication. The contrast with the U.S.A. is marked as those who have had Americans as well as British students in their small groups will have observed. It is almost as if the American student says something in case it might be right whereas the English (the Celts differ in this) refuse to say anything in case it might be wrong. The tables are turned when the essays have to be written and that too says something about the two educational systems.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

If you would like to read more about the topics and issues we have introduced we recommend the following books and articles. We have already referred to several of them in the text.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SMALL GROUP

ABERCROMBIE, M.L.J. (1974) *Aims and Techniques of Group Teaching.* (3rd edition) London, S.R.H.E.

The authoritative work.

THE NUFFIELD GROUP for Research and Innovation in Higher Education in association with RUDDUCK, J. (1976) *Small Group Teaching.* London, The Nuffield Foundation.

STENHOUSE, L. (1972) "Teaching through small group discussion: formality, rules and authority" *Cambridge Journal of Education 2:* pp.18-24.

EXAMPLES OF WIDER STRATEGIES OF INSTRUCTION IN WHICH SMALL GROUP METHODS HAVE A DISTINCTIVE ROLE

COLLIER, K.G. (1968) *New Dimensions in Higher Education.* London, Longmans.

EPSTEIN, H.T. (1970) *A Strategy for Education.* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

PARLETT, M. & KING, J.G. (1971) *Concentrated Study - a pedagogic innovation observed.* London, S.R.H.E.

BEARD, R.M. (1972) *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.* (2nd edition). Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Guidance on how to approach the teaching of intellectual skills and problem-solving.

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